

Drivers of Global Great Power Assertiveness: Russia and Its Involvement in the Global South

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Abstract : This paper examines the impact of international status-seeking aspirations on great power behavior within the international system. In particular, we seek to test the assumption advanced by the proponents of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) that the inability to achieve social mobilization through joining perceived higher-status social groups (of states) leads great powers to adopt the approach of social competition in which they aim to equal or outdo the dominant group in the area on which its claim to superior status rests. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has struggled to be accepted as a great power by the group of Western states that had created the dominant international system order, while the Soviet states were isolated. While the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century can be characterized by striving to integrate into the existing order, the second decade has seen a rather sharp turn towards creating a new power center for Russia through the realization of ideas of multipolarity rivalry and uniqueness of the state itself. Increasingly, we have seen the Kremlin striving to collaborate and mobilize groups of states that fall outside of the categories of democracy, multiculturalism, and international order, the way that is perceived by the dominant group, which can be described as the West. Instead, Russia builds its own narrative where it creates an alternative understanding of these values, differentiating from the higher-status social group. The Global South, from a Russian perspective, is the group of states that can still be swayed to create an alternative power center in the international system - one where Russia can assert its status as a great power. This is based on a number of reasons, the most important being that the global north is already highly institutionalized in terms of economy (the EU) and defense (NATO), leaving no room for Russia but to integrate within the existing framework. Second, the difference in values and their interpretation - Russia has been adamant, for the last twenty years, on basing its moral code on traditional values like religion, the heterosexual family model, and moral superiority, which contradict the overall secularism of the Global North. And last, the striking difference in understanding of state governance models - with Russia becoming more autocratic over the course of the last 20 years, it has deliberately created distance between itself and democratic states, entering a "gray area" of alternative understanding of democracy which is more relatable to the global South countries. Using computational text analysis of the excerpts of Vladimir Putin's speeches delivered from 2000-2022 regarding the areas that fall outside the immediate area of interest of Russia (the Global South), we identify 80 topics that relate to the particular component of the great power status - interest to use force globally. These topics are compared across four temporal frames that capture the periods of more and less permissible Western social boundaries. We find that there exists a negative association between such permissiveness and Putin's emphasis on the "use of force" topics. This lends further support to the Social Identity Theory and contributes to broadening its applicability to explaining the questions related to great power assertiveness in areas outside of their primary focus regions.

Keywords : Russia, Global South, great power, identity

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